[Medieval Georgia]

JUSTICE IN GEORGIA

the Middle Ages, we discover that the abominations are usually perpetrated by the agents of religious corporations or by groups inspired by those fixed ideas known as ideals. The psychology of cruelty is exceedingly obscure; there are the terrible records of the animal cruelty of half-savage hordes like the Mongol invaders of Persia and Russia; there are the defensive cruelties of those resorting to political repression through fear; and there are the administrative cruelties carried out by judges and agents of the law, and, more especially during the Middle Ages, by the agents of the Church. A combination of moral fervour and an insane sensualism seems to inspire the latter kind of cruelty, and when we consider the unnatural environment in which the agents both of the law and of the Church lived, particularly during the Middle Ages, it seems probable that both the moral fervour and the strain of deliberate cruelty which characterizes the historical psychologies of judges and priests may be attributed to a combination of mental and physical repression. From those dried sterile brains the cruelty seemed to ooze like some filthy distillation of the once clean and natural juices of their aborted bodies.

Now the Georgians were not men full of fears, and they did not repress themselves. The fine bright spirit of the mediæval knight, King Dmitri Tavdadébuli, a soldier loved by his people for his justice, his kindness and his charity, a lover of song and of women and a deep philosopher, who at the end could give himself, all naturally, to execution that he might save the people from invasion—that spirit type of the Georgian, laughs down the ages at the men of moral fervour, of repressions and oppressions, with their pincers, their thumbscrews and their racks; and if in the later age of Georgian history, after the Division of the Kingdom, we see cruelties everywhere through the pages of the histories of Kartli, Imereti and Kakheti, we must remember that the demoralization of the long Turkish and Persian wars had eaten deep into the spirit of the Georgians. And even during this period, their cruelties are the cruelties of animals in triumph and animals in fear, quick mutilations with sword and knife, comparatively clean; while over the Latin West in those three centuries there hung the shadow of the torturing Inquisition.

The bulk of cases in mediæval Georgia, apart from those of a criminal nature, were concerned with disputes over the boundaries of property. In such cases, a settlement was arrived at by ordeal of oath and by arbitration. Under Georgian law, as under Islamic law, the oaths of the plaintiff

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any more slaves, and by another, two noble brothers promise 567
the Catholicos Domenti II to repurchase slaves which they had sold at Akhaltzikhé, and also not to divide up families.[1]

Furthermore the practice existed, on the occasion of levies 651
of slaves by Turkish and Persian armies, of buying substitutes 567
from among the mountaineers—Ossetians and Cherkess—in order to avoid surrendering Georgians into slavery. King Wakhtang VI of Kartli is commended for only sending slaves to the Shah when they were actually demanded, and then for buying substitutes instead of sending Georgians.[2] Wakhushti states that, in the reign of King Simon I of Kartli, a special tax of one *marchil* (about two shillings) was levied on each peasant's house in order "to buy Ossetians, Caucasians and Cherkess, which he sent to the Qaen".[3]

Again there was a special obligation laid on the Tatar nomads of Borchalo to provide for the slaves on their way to the Persian border.

Ground down by an inequitable and tyrannous fiscal 565
system, oppressed by onerous feudal obligations, harassed by the perpetual civil warrings of their masters, harried by continual Mussulman incursions, duped and mulcted by an ignorant and unworthy priesthood, and living under the constant threat of deportation and the break-up of their families, the lot of the Georgian peasants was a miserable one. Nature alone was their friend: their physical needs in a mild and equable climate were insignificant; a rich soil, a warm sun and an adequacy of water could rapidly make good to them their losses and their deprivations; a primitive and all-surrounding forest and mountains difficult of access, which they could know better than their masters and their enemies, offered them a near and friendly refuge in their dangers and their troubles. The Georgian peasantry certainly had more to suffer than any other peasantry during the three centuries following the Division of the Kingdom—whatever may have been their relative situation during earlier periods of history. For neither the Armenians nor the peasantry of the Balkan lands nor of Persia and Turkey—great as were their tribulations—had to endure the existence of a perpetual state of war, and the continuous and virulent driving 565
of the slave-traffic. It is the character of the Georgians— 181 ●
the "æsthetic irresponsibility" of them—that has carried them through their miseries; and it is, perhaps, these miseries,

[1] Brosset, *Introduction*, p. lxxiii.
[2] *Idem.*, *Introduction*, p. cbd.
[3] Brosset, *H. de la G.*, I, 105.

[Medieval Georgia]

THE PEOPLE AND THE POWER

565 endured under a bright sun among the wild and primitive
●181 woodlands that has made their character what it is—which has given them their gay and brave fatality.

565 511 "The Poor People", says Chardin, "go almost naked: such is their misery not to be paralell'd; as not having anything to cover their Nakedness but a pitiful sorry Felt like to the Chlamys of the Ancients; into which they thrust their Heads, and turn which way they please as the Wind fits; for it covers but one side of their Bodies, and falls down no lower than their knees. . . .

"He that has a Shirt and a pair of pitiful Drawers thinks himself Rich: for almost all of 'em go Bare-Foot; and such of the Colchians who pretend to Shooes, have nothing but a piece of Buffalo's Hide, and that untann'd too; which piece of raw Hide is lac'd about their Feet with a Thong of the same: so that for all these sort of Sandals, their Feet are as durty, as if they went Bare-foot."

565 847 The respectable jeweller cannot understand the ragged gentlemen at all. He mentions:

"another most inhuman Tenent of theirs, that it is a piece of Charity to Murder Infants newly born, when they have not sufficient wherewith to maintain 'em; or such as are sick and past hopes of recovery. And the reason they give is this, that by so doing, they put those Children out of a great deal of misery, which they would undergo in a languishing Distemper, which in the end must of necessity carry 'em off. Such are the Arguments of these Barbarous People that have neither shame nor Humanity." [1]

[1] *Chardin* (1686 ed.), pp. 85–6.

WEALTH AND STATE

644 Since the capture of Tiflis from the Muslims by King David Aghmashenebeli in 1122, the Court of the Bagratids had been removed there from Kutais. But those strong and watchful rulers were always moving. In summer, the half-nomadic Court passed up into the highlands of Samtzkhé, where the King might enjoy an equable climate, while overlooking the most turbulent of his feudatories.[1] During the autumn the Court hunted over the vast preserves of Nadcharmagevi on the marches of Amier and Imier,[2] and in the winter it went sometimes to Geguti or to Tzkhomi (Sukhum) in Abkhazeti.[3]

527 On great feast-days, the people, as they love, got their sight of the magnificence of royalty and nobility.

"On the first day of January", writes Wakhushti, "before the morning prayer, the Dchqondideli offered the King and Queen a cross, an icon, a robe and some sugared cakes; after mass all the *eristavni*, the officers and persons about the court made gifts of objects relating to their own particular functions. For instance the Chief of the Falconers offered a falcon, a kite and the gilded head of a wild goat; the Master of the Horse, a horse in gilded harness; and the other court officials gifts relating to their employment; for the *eristavni* it was a matter of a horse each. These last and also all the others brought an arrow, meaning that they intended it for the King's enemies, and saying, 'God prolong your reign for many years, and may this arrow reach the heart of your enemy'. After the acclamation of the army, there was a great feast, rejoicings and fêtes. As for the horses presented by the *eristavni*, the Chief of the Falconers had them led into the enclosure of the royal hunt near the palace where he killed them in the evening. During the night the enclosure filled with foxes, jackals and wolves; in the morning a keeper shut the gates and prevented the beasts from getting out. The next day at an early hour the King came there on horseback with all his nobles and the beasts were released and shot down with arrows. After that they returned to the feast.

"Here are the Easter ceremonies. Mass at daybreak; after Mass, the King and the nobles broke the fast with a light meal of meats, then they went to the hippodrome. There they set at the top of a mast the royal cup of gold and silver, which served as a target for the arrows of the young boys; the one who knocked it down received it as a reward. After that the tourney; the victors had the royal box on their side and each received a reward. The same thing was done on the royal marriage-day and other important occasions; later the company was entertained by the King at superb banquets, accompanied by music and other diversions.

"While the Catholicos and bishops were present there was no music but simply chants. When they departed, music, dancing and diversions began."[4]

● 187 The culture of mediæval Georgia was in character with the feudal culture of the contemporary Christian world, but it

[1] Cf. Brosset, *H. de la G.*, I, 474.
[2] Brosset, *H. de la G.*, I, 474.
[3] Wakhushti, *Dès. Géo.*, p. 251.
[4] Wakhushti, *Dès. Géo.*, pp. 32–5.

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181 had its very individual aspects. The Georgian feudal monarchy through all its vicissitudes retained the tradition of an antique and continuing civility and something of this continuing civility had come down from the period of the Achæmenians and maybe from the centuries before the Swarming Time from Khaldi and the forgotten Caucasian kingdoms of the Bronze Age.

The habit of a settled life, possession of wealth, no little splendour, the mind of kingship, all were old in Georgia. And of all the antique spontaneities, of all the back-dating, free and individual upgrowths of Western Asia, the Georgian nation had alone contrived continuing survival. For the Armenians in the eleventh century were finished as an independent social body.

186 Therefore, the Georgians, in tradition, culture, sense of nationhood, were apart from the moving, scarcely conscious mass of the Muslim peoples around them. And they were by far ahead of, different from, the new raw peoples forming into nations, in Russia, Hungary and the Balkans. The Georgians had an aristocracy of their own blood, and kings the same, a political fact not common over all the variegated mosaic of Europe of the twelfth century. But with all the strong marking of their early come-by individual nationhood, the Georgians were in close and running contact with the two living cultures of the mediæval world, Christendom and Islam, and the mind of their rulers—in constant dangerous intimacy with the great Imperial powers in Byzantium and Persia—could never afford to be parochial.

565 644 The Georgian nobles were typical of the feudal classes over all the mediæval world—hard-living, turbulent, superstitious and amoral. To them, life was an affair of forays, huntings, joustings, quick come-and-go of looted wealth, abundant wine and easy women. And they cowered before the Church, as even the best of them trembled and marvelled at the tricks and contortions of astrologers, magicians and dervishes.[1]

Yet these truculent soldiers, princes of the mountains, were at the same time wealthy gentlemen and dilettanti, who followed the fashions of Byzantium, not only in dress and ceremonial like the aristocracies of the Balkan and Danubian lands, but in tastes, in art and books. David Soslani, the swashbuckling husband of Tamara who could give a village

[1] Cf. Brosset, *H. de la G.*, I, 329 and 460 *et seq.*, for accounts of sorceries in mediæval Georgia. Even by Tamara, Evlogi, "the madman of Christ", was regarded with respect.

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439 Shooes and in a word in all things most necessary for Man's use. There were all sorts of Grocery and Pothecary's Ware, Spices, Perfumes, Drugs and all manner of Oyntments. So that the vessel seemed to be a little Town, where everything was to be had." [1]

[436] Almost all the foreign trade was transacted by barter, and both Chardin and Pitton de Tournefort found that the people preferred to be paid for goods in stuffs and trinkets rather than in currency.

197 The long period of perpetual contact, both commercial and political, with their powerful Mussulman neighbours had a profound effect on the peoples of the Caucasus. The more highly civilized Georgians and Armenians, strong in the antique traditions of East Christian culture, were outwardly affected in modes and habits and some ways of thought; the peoples of the mountains, who had not by the fifteenth century emerged from the tribal state, forgot their thin Christianity and became Muslim in culture as well as in outward fashion. Not only did Islam penetrate the remoter valleys of Circassia, but it became the religion of the relatively civilized Meskhians and Abkhaz.[2]

[771] The easy religious casuistry of the Georgian princes was natural to them as well as convenient to their political interests. In the seventeenth century the old mediæval culture of Christendom, which had flourished in the Kingdom of Georgia, was half-forgotten, and it was only the more sensitive [341] spirits who were prepared still to make sacrifices in the memory of its tradition. The new architecture of Tiflis, in the Mukhranian days, was altogether in the Muslim style; 562 dress, manners, furnishing, were Persian. The position of women was also affected and Chardin noted a tendency, since the Persian rule began in Tiflis, towards the seclusion of women. They went veiled in the streets, while in the country districts, where there were no Mussulmans, they still adhered to the Christian custom.[3]

• 181 The travellers of the seventeenth century are none too generous in their appraisal of the Georgian character. Chardin has a long diatribe on the Georgians, and he condemns their immorality, their drunkenness, their knavery and their arrogance. But even he admits, by contrary, that "*they are Civil and Courteous and more than that, they are Grave and Moderate*".[4]

[1] Chardin, p. 73.
[2] For the progress of Islam in Samtzkhé during the seventeenth century, see Wakhushti, *Histoire de Samtzkhé*, in Brosset, *Hist. de la G.*, II, i, 232–5.
[3] Chardin, p. 226. [4] *Idem.*, p. 191.

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Pitton de Tournefort, in a few words, probably sums up best a traveller's impression of the Georgians, when he compares them with the Turks—

> "C'est un excellent pays que la Géorgie . . . on s'adresse surtout aux Francs avec un visage riant, au lieu qu'en Turquie on ne voit que les gens sérieux qui vous mesurent gravement depuis les pieds jusque a la teste." [1]

Chardin is, further, strongly condemnatory of the women, although he admits their high standard of good looks.[2] The Huguenot jeweller condemns their morals, of which he had no great opportunity of knowing much;[3] he condemns their conversation, of which he can have understood little; and he condemns their habit of painting their faces, which is, after all, a matter of individual taste.[4] It is not difficult to read between his pompous, downright lines, that he was sometimes rebuffed and often teased and always being laughed at. For in the accounts of Chardin and other writers who have described the Georgians, we can often read between the lines the moving of a gentle humour in the spirit of the people in process of description. For to superior ones it is better to apply your humour than your indignation. And the Georgians in all their splendours and their miseries were humorists. That gentle bantering humour is exemplified, indeed, in the Story of King Shah-Nawaz and the Superior's Spinet.[5] It is too long a story to recount here. But the Georgians could always laugh, and laughter, where high principle goes down, can survive terror and it can outlive Empires.

[1] Pitton de Tournefort, II, 301.

[2] Chardin, pp. 84, 190.

[3] "They are naturally very subtle and of clear and quick Apprehensions, Extremely Civil, Full of Ceremonies and Complements; but otherwise the Wickedest Women in the World, Haughty, Furious, Perfidious, Deceitful, Cruel and Impudent. So that there is no sort of Wickedness which they will not put in Execution to procure Lovers, preserve their Affection, or else to destroy 'em."

[4] Chardin, pp. 85 and 119; cf. also Sir Robert Ker-Porter, an exceedingly genteel individual who made his way into the ladies' public baths in Tiflis in 1817: "a stone divan spread with carpets and mattresses was placed round the room, and on it lay or sat, women in every attitude and occupation consequent on an Asiatic bath. Some were half-dressed and others hardly had a covering. They were attended by servants employed in rubbing the fair forms of these ladies with dry cloths, or dyeing their hair or eyebrows, or finally painting or rather enamelling their faces. . . ." After further details Sir Robert adds with supreme unction, "They seemed to have as little modest covering on their minds as on their bodies; and the whole scene became so unpleasant, that declining our conductress's offer to show us further, we made good our retreat, fully satisfied with the extent of our gratified curiosity." (*Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, etc., etc. during the years* 1817, 1818, 1819 *and* 1820, London, 1821, Vol. I, pp. 120–1.)

[5] Chardin, p. 229.

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291 regard to shaving the head and the same kind of caps as Barbaro had observed in the fifteenth. Of the gentry Chardin says that " ils sont si gueux et si misérables, que pour ne point gâter à la pluie leur calotte ou leur bonnet ils le mettent dans la poche lorsqu'il pleut et vont ainsi tête nue." He adds that [293] every man carried a length of rope " pour attacher les personnes et le bétail qu'ils enlèvent à leurs voisins "; a knife and a stone with which to sharpen it, a gun and three leather pouches, containing respectively salt, pepper, and needles and thread.

He adds that the poor peasantry go nearly naked, with simply a piece of felt to cover them. " Ils mettent le feutre," he says, " en passant la tête dedans, et ils le tournent comme ils veulent du côté que vient le vent ou la pluie ; car il ne couvre qu'un côté du corps, et ne descend que jusqu'aux genoux."

Most of the mediæval travellers agree in describing the 121 Georgian gentry as ignorant and idle, dissolute and venal, [274] gluttonous and drunken. The history of these days is one long enumeration of murders, assassinations, mutilations, robberies, abductions and treacheries, and it is easy to believe the worst which the travellers have to say of their Georgian hosts. Nevertheless, condemnation of the manners of mediæval and eighteenth-century Georgia should be tempered by the consideration that the vices and crimes recorded are comparative. The condition of the serfs of Georgia was no worse than that of the serfs of Russia or of Continental Europe ; the lives of the princes no more extravagant and no more immoral than those of the courtiers of Louis XIV or of Charles II. Further, local conditions both of climate and of politics tended to vitiate the characters of the Georgian gentry. A lowland climate and a land of plenty, and a diet composed chiefly of millet and pork, made them lazy and luxury-loving ; an abundance of wine made them drunkards ; their privileges made them extravagant. Again, difficult political conditions, which required the conciliation of a powerful neighbour, or the betrayal of a weak or unwary ally, produced a type of man who was opportunist, unscrupulous, venal and without ideals. Lastly, frequent contact with the degenerate civilisations of Islam and with the minor ruffians of Persian and Turkish history accelerated a general decline of morals and a lapse into a sensual and undignified mode of life.

Chardin gives the following analysis of the character of the Georgians, with which the observations of previous and contemporary travellers are in general agreement : " Les Géorgiens

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ont naturellement beaucoup d'esprit; l'on en feroit des gens 181
savants et des grands maîtres, si on les élevoit dans les sciences et dans les arts; mais l'éducation qu'on leur donne étant fort méchante, et n'ayant que de mauvais exemples, ils deviennent très ignorans et très vicieux. Ils sont fourbes, fripons, perfides, traîtres, ingrats, superbes. . . . Outre ces vices de l'esprit, ils ont ceux de la sensualité les plus sales, l'ivrognerie et la luxure. Ils se plongent d'autant plus avant dans ces saletés, qu'elles sont communes et nullement déshonnêtes en Géorgie. . . . Pour le reste, les Géorgiens ont de la civilité et de l'humanité, et de plus ils sont graves et modérés."

The life of the Georgian gentleman was passed entirely in 565
hunting, in war and in the satisfaction of personal feuds; from 224
the age of four years he was brought up to horsemanship and 262
the use of arms; every man was a past-master with the bow and lance. They hunted the jackal and the fox with hounds, but their favourite pastime was hawking, their principal game being cranes, herons and pheasants. After the chase the company would give themselves up to feasting and drinking. A main item of diet was *gom*, a kind of porridge made with millet, which formed almost the sole nourishment of the peasants, and was a much-appreciated course at the tables of the gentry. They had little fish except tunny and salt-fish imported from Trebizond and Kaffa, but ate many varieties of meat, the most abundant of which was pork, then venison, beef, mutton and hare.

At any great feast it was a point of honour to become in- 273
toxicated, and he who failed in this respect was considered to be a poor fellow. The lower classes, however, were often miserably fed, and the standard of their living was a very low one.

Georgian was a literary language, at least from the time of 212
Pharnavaz, who is said to have introduced the Georgian alphabet, derived, like the Armenian, through the Pahvli and Zend, from the Aramæan. The earliest extant examples of Georgian writing are copies of the Bible, lives of the Saints and other sacred works.

The Mongol and later Mussulman wars effectually checked 517
the natural development of Georgian intellectual life, and to 538
the separation from the philosophical and educational influences of Western Europe must be attributed much of the illiteracy, coarseness and lack of idealism of the Georgian aristocracy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What little literary culture there was in the country was the preserve of

6: Grigolia E-4, 5 (no date) 1939 RI1 Georgia RI1
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of foreign blood. This fact is endorsed also by every investigator or mere traveler who has come in contact with these people.

Describing the differences in the moral traits among the various members of Svan communities, R. Bernoville[4] also mentions the diversity of their physical types. "Parmi toutes ces communes," writes the author, "issues d'un même sang et séparées seulement par quelques verstes[5] de distance, il n'en est pas une qui n'ait son cachet, son charactere à part. Tout, jusqu'au type des physionomies, donne la preuve de cette curieuse classification."

In the same way as Bernoville, the Russian investigator, V. J. Teptsov[6] describes the diversity of physical and moral traits among the Svans, giving the facts in more detailed form.

"Each community," writes Mr. Teptsov, "puts on every member a specific stamp. Everyone who has visited Svanetia is able to discern without any difficulty, for example, an inhabitant of Ushkul from that of Mulakh, or an inhabitant of Mulakh from that of Mestia, etc. The man from Ushkul is of dark complexion, slim, tall, alert, and a poet at heart. The resident of Mestia is the typical representative of North Russia, a native of the Iaroslav department, with the specific shovel-like beard and with smiling, restless eyes. The man from Mulakh is pure Little Russian (Ukrainian), not only by his appearance, but also in character and the manner of his life. . . . The representative of Lakhmul is of the Jewish type; the Svans themselves regard the inhabitants of Lakhmul as Jews. The people of Chubukhevi are either of Gypsy or Mongol type. Finally, the residents of Etseri have conserved the traits of the Georgian type. So that the existence of a specific original type of Svans," adds the author, "is a myth. This is clear to everyone who has had a chance to visit Svanetia."

A similar opinion concerning the physical traits of the Svans is expressed by Dr. G. Radde, the investigator of the Caucasus and the first director of the Caucasian Museum in Tiflis, at present the Museum of Georgia. "When you see Svans together," writes

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[4] Bernoville: 108.
[5] Verst—the Russian measure of length, equal to 0.66 mile.
[6] Teptsov: a, 42-3.